



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 29, 2006

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Kind Continues Efforts to Reach CCP Consensus in Meeting w/ U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Public-private Partnerships Key to Success of Final Plan

Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI), Co-Chair of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Task Force, along with Co-Chair Rep. Gil Gutknecht (R-MN), met with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Director Dale Hall and the Acting Chief of the Refuges Geoffrey Haskett yesterday to address existing concerns regarding the navigable waterways component of the proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Following the meeting, Reps. Kind and Gutknecht sent a letter to Director Hall urging USFWS to conduct a period of voluntary “Slow, No Wake” and “Electric Motor Areas” boating restrictions in the final CCP to evaluate the efficacy of voluntary compliance as a balanced solution that recognizes the refuge’s short-term and long-term needs and maintains the essential public-private partnerships in managing the refuge.

Letter below.

June 29, 2006

Mr. H. Dale Hall
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Hall:

Thank you for meeting with us earlier this week regarding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Upper Mississippi River Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The issue of federal regulation of navigable waterways in the Refuge is a matter of great interest to the users and friends of the refuge in our districts and we appreciate your taking time to listen to our concerns.

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As discussed, **we urge you to include a period of voluntary “Slow, No Wake” and “Electric Motor Areas” boating restrictions in the final CCP** to prove or disprove the efficacy of voluntary compliance. With the strong concern expressed by the Wisconsin State Attorney General and State Legislators regarding the state’s right over sovereign waters as embodied in the original 1925 refuge agreement, the proposed mandatory boating restrictions have the potential to precipitate an unnecessary and protracted legal battle that would take decision-making out of the hands of refuge managers where it belongs.

Several reasons have been suggested for not trying a voluntary approach and we would like to briefly comment on some of these:

Claim: *A voluntary approach will eventually erode the level of compliance.*

Discussion: The trend over time in the voluntary Lake Onalaska Waterfowl Hunting Closed Area in Pool 7 appears to refute this assertion. A U.S. Geological Survey study shows no increase in boating incursions over time despite a near doubling of boating traffic over the same period.

Claim: *There is little literature on the effectiveness of the voluntary compliance approach.*

Discussion: A lack of relevant literature on voluntary compliance only reinforces the value of implementing monitoring period of voluntary compliance to determine its effectiveness and the impact of any incursions.

Claim: *A voluntary approach in one state could lead to confusion among a public who often cross state lines.*

Discussion: It can just as easily be claimed that mandatory regulations in adjacent states will reinforce the importance of no-wake zones in the mind of the boater and result in an *increase* in voluntary compliance in Wisconsin waters. Again, a monitoring period would confirm or refute this.

Claim: *Setting a threshold to trigger mandatory restrictions is difficult due a lack of science on appropriate thresholds and the variability of sites.*

Discussion: If we know enough about the effects of boating impacts on wildlife to restrict boating in a variety of sites, by extension, we know enough to set thresholds in those sites. The same body of science informs both management decisions.

As co-chairs of the Congressional Upper Mississippi River Basin Task Force, we understand the tremendous challenges presented by the CCP process and commend the hard work being done by Don Hultman and the refuge staff in developing this plan. Unfortunately, much of this hard work is being overshadowed by public outcry over a boating policy for a small portion of the refuge. We strongly believe that a period of voluntary compliance will increase community ‘buy in’ and ameliorate much of the concern. If handled correctly, the CCP process will ultimately provide the Refuge and its many user-groups with important long-term benefits.

Sincerely,

Ron Kind
Member of Congress

Gil Gutknecht
Member of Congress